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- WAR EPISODES

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Civil War Episodes

Vicksburg

Excerpts from newspapers and other sources

From the files of the
Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection

Operations of the Fleets under Porter and Farragut.

WASHINGTON, Sunday, May 24.

The Navy Department has received information that Admiral PORTER has been cooperating with Gen. GRANT in the siege of Vicksburg. His fleet was cannonading the city and its works (still in the hands of the rebels) by night, while GRANT's army assailed it by day, thus giving the rebels within the town and intrenchments not a moment's relaxation from the perils of their situation.

The same department has also received official information that Admiral FARRAGUT's fleet is actively engaged in bombarding Port Hudson.

REBEL ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF DEFEAT.

FORTRESS MONROE, Sunday, May 24.

The Richmond Dispatch of May 23 contains the following:

1st MOBILE, Thursday, May 21.

In Saturday's fight we lost thirty pieces of artillery, which were spiked and abandoned.

On Saturday the Federals advanced to take the Big Black bridge, but were repulsed. They crossed higher up, and took us in the rear where the bridge was burned and the works abandoned. Our loss is heavy.

Vicksburg is closely besieged. The enemy is closing in on every side."

The Richmond Enquirer, in addition to the Mobile telegram of May 21, says:

"Gen. LOBING has assumed command of Jackson.

No official confirmation has been received here of the crossing of the Big Black by the Federals, or of the destruction of the bridge and abandonment of the works. Private dispatches from Jackson up to the 22d say nothing of these events."

HEADQUARTERS ARMY OF THE POTOMAC,
SUNDAY, May 24.

The latest published rebel intelligence from Vicksburg is in effect that Gen. GRANT had crossed the Big Black above the burnt bridge, and had circumvented Vicksburg, taking thirty rebel guns. The papers speak mournfully of their prospects in the Southwest, and hope that affairs there may prove less disastrous than reported.

ADDITIONAL REBEL ACCOUNTS.

From the Montgomery (Ala.) Advertiser, May 18.

The rumors as to the fall of Jackson, Miss., in circulation yesterday, were so vague and uncertain, that we had well nigh despaired of hearing anything intelligible from that quarter.

It appears that the fight began at an early hour Thursday morning, some eight miles southwest of Jackson, and continued nearly all day, our troops commanded by Johnston and the enemy's by Grant. We were finally driven back to Jackson, and fought them through the streets until overpowered by greatly superior numbers, and were compelled to evacuate the city, the enemy's forces amounting to about 20,000 or 30,000, and our own only to about 9,000. Gen. Johnston then retreated on Canton, twenty-four miles due north of Jackson, situated on the wagon road connecting thence by Valden to the road running due east to the Yazoo River, and leading directly to Vicksburg, some seventy miles from Jackson by this route.

When heard from yesterday morning, the enemy's cavalry were at Brandon, on the Southern Road, twenty odd miles this side of Jackson, near which point we had a force to protect the road. This fact is official, and may be relied on.

Gen. JOHNSTON had arrived at Jackson 11 A. M. Wednesday, and the fight commencing so early the next morning, left him no time to reorganize and concentrate the forces, and he no doubt made a desperate resistance under great disadvantages. It is stated that some days before leaving Tennessee Gen. Johnston sent Gen. Pemberton an order to somewhat change his plans which was forthwith set aside by the latter as very improper directions to so consequential a commander, whereupon Gen. JOHNSTON received an order at the last moment on Saturday to go to Mississippi and take command of the army. He left the same day, and arrived in unprecedented time, as before stated—Wednesday morning. We are glad to learn that

his complacent predecessor had so far anticipated the evacuation as to have the most important supplies and the archives and other articles of value removed. Our army has four months provisions at Vicksburg. We have ample forces in communication in Mississippi, under the masterly lead of JOHNSTON, to meet and repel the invaders; but it may require some little time to put our forces in the proper position.

GEN. JOE JOHNSTON IN FULL COMMAND OF THE REBEL FORCES AROUND VICKSBURG.

From the Richmond Enquirer, May 20.

The "retreat towards Vicksburg" of Gen. GRANT's army, mentioned in a late dispatch, proves to have been an advance of the Federals upon Vicksburg. They have been met by Gen. PEMBERTON, near the eastern bank of the Big Black River.

Vicksburg, therefore, may now be said to be besieged both by land and water; and if some happy combination be not made between the forces under PEMBERTON and JOHNSTON the heroic city may possibly fall. Gen. JOHNSTON is in the supreme command in that department.

THE FALL OF VICKSBURG.

WASHINGTON, Sunday, May 24.

At 11 A. M. to-day, the President received the following telegraphic announcement that Vicksburg is ours:

"CLEVELAND, Ohio, Sunday, May 24.

A dispatch from Mr. FULLER, the manager of the telegraph at Memphis, dated late in the night, says the Stars and Stripes float over Vicksburg, and the victory is complete. I have held this message, hoping to get the confirmation, but the line has been interrupted, and I now give it to you as it reached me. I think the wires will be all right soon."

THE NEWS FULLY CREDITED.

WASHINGTON, Sunday, May 24.

Up to 10 P. M., no further news from Vicksburg had been received, since the dispatch via Cleveland, announcing the fall of the city. The news is fully credited, however, and there is general rejoicing over the practical reopening of the Mississippi.

FROM ANOTHER CORRESPONDENT.

WASHINGTON, Sunday, May 24.

Up to 10 o'clock to-night the President had received no further intelligence, excepting a telegram from Memphis, dated 4:30 this afternoon, saying nothing later yet than the morning report of the capture of Vicksburg.

From the facts already received, no doubt seems to be entertained in any quarter of the fall of Vicksburg. The official confirmation, however, is awaited with anxiety. There was rejoicing throughout the city to-day.

VICKSBURG.

An Official Announcement to the President that Vicksburgh has Fallen.

The Stars and Stripes Floating Over the Rebel Stronghold.

THE VICTORY COMPLETE.

Probable Capture of the Entire Rebel Army Under Pemberton.

Official Details of Gen. Grant's Progress After Leaving Jackson.

Two Great Battles Fought on Saturday and Sunday, 16th and 17th.

Fifty-Seven Pieces of Artillery Captured.

Heavy Losses of the Enemy in Killed, Wounded and Prisoners.

THE CROSSING OF THE BIG BLACK.

Capture of Haines' Bluff and Investment of the City.

Co-operation by Admiral Porter's Gunboats.

THE REBELS KEPT BUSY, DAY AND NIGHT.

The following dispatch was received in Washington on Saturday, and appeared in our Sunday edition:

MEMPHIS, Tenn., Saturday, May 23.

Col. Anson Stager, Washington, D. C.:

Official information from below, to Wednesday, states that Gen. Grant has captured Haines' Bluff and the outer works of Vicksburgh, a large number of prisoners, and fifty-seven pieces of artillery.

The battle is still raging, with every prospect of capturing the entire force in Vicksburgh.

We hold Jackson, Black River Bridge and Haines' Bluff.

A report is making up for Washington.

(Signed,)

W. G. FULLER,

Ass't Manager of Telegraph.

HIGHLY IMPORTANT OFFICIAL DETAILS.

WASHINGTON, Saturday, May 23.

The following dispatch has just been received at the War Department:

MEMPHIS, Tenn., Saturday, May 23.

I forward the following, just received from Col. JOHN A. RAWLINS, Assistant Adjutant-General:

REAR OF VICKSBURG, Wednesday, May 20, 1863.

The Army of the Tennessee landed at Bruinsburgh on the 30th of April.

On the 1st of May we fought the battle of Port Gibson, and defeated the rebels under Gen. BOWEN, whose loss in killed, wounded and prisoners, was at least 1,500, and loss in artillery five pieces.

On the 12th of May, at the battle of Raymond, the rebels were defeated with a loss of 800.

On the 14th of May we defeated Gen. JOSEPH E. JOHNSTON, and captured Jackson with a loss to the enemy of 400, besides immense stores and manufactures, and seventeen pieces of artillery.

On the 16th of May we fought the bloody and decisive battle of Baker's Creek, in which the entire force of Vicksburgh, under Gen. Pemberton, was defeated with the loss of 29 pieces of artillery and 4,000 men.

On the 17th of May we defeated the same force at the Big Black River Bridge, with the loss of 2,600 men and seventeen pieces of artillery.

On the 18th of May we invested Vicksburgh closely.

To-day Gen. STEELE carried the rifle-pits on the north of the city.

The right of the army rests on the Mississippi above Vicksburgh.

JOHN A. RAWLINS,

Assistant Adjutant-General.

POSTSCRIPT.—I learn further that there are from fifteen to twenty thousand men in Vicksburgh, and that Pemberton has lost nearly all his field artillery, and that the cannonading at Vicksburgh closed at about 3 P. M. on the 20th of May.

Gen. Grant has probably captured nearly all the

The Great Battles at Baker's Black River Bridge.

The following dispatch was received by War Department yesterday:

MEMPHIS, Tenn., May 23—11½ A. M.

Hon. Edwin M. Stanton, Secretary of War:

The following dispatch has been received at

these headquarters, and is forwarded as requested.

S. A. HURLBUT, Major-General.

REAR OF VICKSBURG, }
May 20, 1863—6 A. M.

Hon. E. M. Stanton, Secretary of War:

Gen. GRANT won a great and momentous victory over the rebels under PEMBERTON, on the Jackson and Vicksburgh road at Baker's Creek, on the 16th inst.

PEMBERTON had a most formidable position on the crest of a wooded hill, over which the road passes longitudinally. He had about 25,000 men. The battle begun at 11 A. M., and was gained at 4 P. M. Its brunt was borne by Hovey's division of McCLENNAND's corps, and by LOGAN's and CROCKER's divisions of McPHERSON's corps.

Hovey attacked the hill, and held the greater part of it till 2 o'clock P. M., when, having lost 1,600 men, he was succeeded by Boomer's and HOLMES' brigades of CROCKER's division, by which the conflict was ended in that part of the field. Boomer lost 500 men.

LOGAN operated on the right, and cut off the enemy's direct retreat, so that he was compelled to escape by his right flank through the woods. LOGAN lost 400 killed and wounded. We took about 2,000 prisoners.

On the 17th, advancing to the Big Black, we fought PEMBERTON again at the bridge there, and captured 3,000 more prisoners. He fought in rifle-pits, protected by a difficult bayou full of abatis. LAWLE's brigade of McCLENNAND's corps charged the rifle-pits magnificently, and took more prisoners than their own numbers. PEMBERTON burned his bridge, and returned to Vicksburgh with only three cannon out of sixty that he had taken out.

Building four bridges over the Big Black, Gen. GRANT arrived before the town on the evening of the 18th, and now holds it closely invested. He had opened a line of supplies via Chickasaw Bayou, having cut the town off from Haines' Bluff, which is abandoned by the enemy, and which Gen. GRANT will occupy.

There was sharp fighting through the day yesterday.

STEELE won and holds the upper bluffs, and the enemy's upper water batteries, and gets water from the Mississippi.

SHERMAN's corps lost yesterday 500 killed and wounded.

McPHERSON, who holds the centre, lost little, as did McCLENNAND, who holds the left.

The gunboats kept the enemy alert during the night, and probably the town will be carried to-day.

There are from 15,000 to 20,000 men in it.

PREVIOUS DISPATCH FROM GEN. HURLBUT.

MEMPHIS, TENN., Thursday, May 21, 1863—11 A. M.

Maj.-Gen. H. W. Halleck, General-in-Chief, Washington:

A citizen has arrived at Lagrange who left Canton on Saturday morning. He reports that Gen. JOE JOHNSTON was at Calhoun, seventeen miles north of Jackson, with 6,000 men, endeavoring to effect a junction with Gen. PEMBERTON, at Edwards' Station. At Holly Springs he saw a dispatch from Canton, dated the 19th, as follows: "General GRANT was reinforced and drove the enemy into his intrenchments on the Big Black. General JOHNSTON ordered all his provisions from Canton. The Pearl River Bridge at Jackson and the trestle work at Brandon were burned."

S. A. HURLBUT, Major-General.

REPORTS RECEIVED FROM CAIRO.

CAIRO, Sunday, May 24.

It is reported that Gen. SHERMAN has taken Haines' and Chickasaw Bluffs, with 8,000 prisoners, 100 guns, and ammunition and commissary stores. The prisoners were paroled and sent across the Yazoo.

Another report says those points were evacuated, and SHERMAN took quiet possession.

Gen. GRANT attacked the upper batteries of Vicksburgh Sunday, while the gunboats attacked the water batteries.

Tuesday the upper batteries were captured and turned on the water batteries.

The paroled prisoners who were brought across from Vicksburgh say our forces have possession of the entire line of outer fortifications, and rebel officers told these men since the capture of Haines' Bluff that there was no chance of escape.

The rebel force is estimated from 20,000 to 30,000. The wildest confusion existed among them. Officers were unable to keep the line of battle.

The Empress—the last boat up—says when she left Wednesday evening the firing had ceased. There is no doubt but that the rebels surrendered.

Gen. BLAIR reached Chickasaw Bluffs on Tuesday, and was sent down for rations. The Federal loss is reported heavy.

Lincoln Asked Him for News of Vicksburg

From Lincoln

On the evening of May 24, 1863, a wire from Washington carried this message:

Anson Stager, Cleveland, O.—Late last night Fuller telegraphed you, as you say, that "the Stars and Stripes float over Vicksburg and the victory is complete." Did he know what he said, or did he say it without knowing it? Your dispatch of this afternoon throws some doubt upon it. A. Lincoln.

Vicksburg, long besieged, did not fall into Union hands until July 4. Apparently, Fuller had said "it without knowing it." At least, the president knew where to direct his inquiry. I know of no record of Stager's reply.

Who was Anson Stager? Cleveland's many historians have had little or nothing to say about him. He neither was born here nor died here but for a dozen years he was an important figure in Cleveland and he is buried here. In 1863 when Lincoln wired him to ask about Vicksburg Stager was superintendent of all the Union telegraph lines. He was supposed to know.

Anson Stager

Anson Stager was born in Ontario County, New York, in 1825 and spent his boyhood in Rochester. His first job was that of printer's devil in the office of the Rochester Democrat. Here he came under the influence of the mercurial Henry O'Reilly and soon his interest in printing as a vocation faded out. In the history of the telegraph in America O'Reilly was a figure of importance, particularly in the middle '40s when the country was astir with the commercial possibilities of this new agency of communication.

By 1845, Stager had advanced to a bookkeeper's job. More important to him, as it turned out, that same year O'Reilly contracted with S. F. B. Morse and his associates to build a telegraph line from Philadelphia to the middle west. Bookkeeper Stager caught the fever, left his ledgers to study telegraphy and by the time the first

By ARCHER H. SHAW

O'Reilly line was ready for business he was ready to operate its Lancaster office.

Stager's rise in the new industry was rapid. By 1847 he was manager of the Pittsburgh office and before the year ended went to Cincinnati as manager of the operating department of the Pittsburgh, Cincinnati & Louisville Telegraph Co. Five years later he became general superintendent of the New York & Mississippi Valley Printing Telegraph Co., at that time the principal telegraphic system of the West.

In Cleveland

He came to Cleveland in 1856 as general superintendent of the Western Union, which had come into existence that year. At the outbreak of the Civil War he was made manager of all telegraph lines in the Department of Ohio and before long became military superintendent of all telegraph lines and offices in the North. Stager's genius for organization served his country well. Under his direction were built and operated some 15,000 miles of military lines, comprising a system of marvelous usefulness to the Union cause, a fact recognized by Secretary Stanton in a letter to President Lincoln. For the first time in military history commanders in the field could keep in touch with each other and all of them with general headquarters. The wires followed the armies. These activities required long absences from Cleveland but this city remained his home.

At the war's close Stager was breveted a brigadier general. He refused a proffered appointment as general superintendent of the entire Western Union system and accepted, instead, the superintendency of its central division, in part because this would permit him to remain a Clevelander. However, in 1869 this office was moved to Chicago and Stager went with it. Both in Cleveland and Chicago he interested himself in many industrial enterprises.

Thus two Cleveland names stand high in the history of telegraphy, Jephtha H. Wade and Anson Stager. Wade was the older by fourteen years and got into the picture from the construction side, while Stager made his entrance from the side of management. The two men were said to have met first by chance at a railroad lunch counter in Shelby, O., and from that fortuitous encounter grew an informal partnership which continued many years.

The Cleveland headquarters of the Western Union was in the Washington Block, at the corner of Bank and St. Clair, across the street from the Kennard House. Wade and Stager with offices under the same roof, lived not far from each other on Euclid Avenue in the section then and long afterward famed for its mansions.

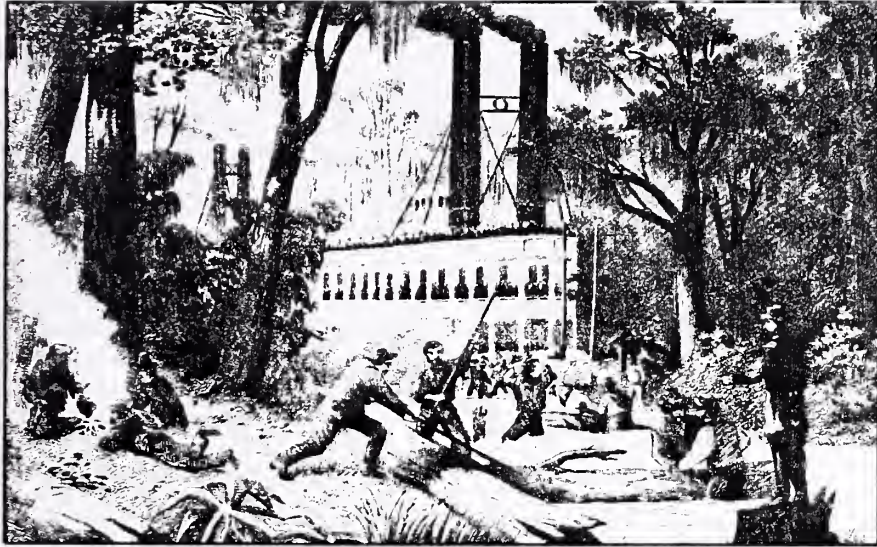
Several vitally important steps in the development of the Western Union were credited to Stager. For one he originated the form of contract which gave to that corporation the exclusive privilege of stringing wires along railroad rights of way. Stager was said to have been, in his early days, the first to read a telegraphic message by sound.

Anson Stager died in Chicago in March, 1885. His body was brought to Cleveland for burial in Lake View Cemetery, which his friend Wade had been influential in establishing. A guard of honor, composed by prominent Chicago industrialists, accompanied Stager on his last journey, among them Robert T. Lincoln, son of the president who had wired him for news of Vicksburg.

MARCH 27, 1983

Significa

By Irving Wallace, David Wallechinsky and Amy Wallace



Union soldiers try to reroute the Mississippi past enemy stronghold in 1862

Last Ditch Ditch

An effort was once made to change the course of the Mississippi River. During the Civil War, the river's course was a hazard for the North because it looped past Vicksburg, Miss., right under bluffs that gave the Confederates command over 17 miles of water. Boats passing below could not raise their guns high enough to fire at the fortifications above. Vicksburg was an important prize because it linked Arkansas, Louisiana and Texas with the rest of the South.

In 1862, Union Gen. Thomas Williams tried to build a canal to reroute the Mississippi and bypass Vicksburg,

but rising waters foiled him. Then in 1863, at President Lincoln's request, Ulysses S. Grant tried to widen Williams' canal to make it usable. Four thousand men were put to work with dredges, picks and shovels. Grant called this "a series of experiments to consume time, and to divert the attention of the enemy, of my troops, and of the public generally." That was all the canal accomplished, for the effort was unsuccessful. On July 4, 1863, Grant finally took Vicksburg by more conventional means.

Thirteen years later, heavy rains did cause the Mississippi to change its course, bypassing Vicksburg.

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~~31.~~ VICKSBURG 4 JULY 1863. Probably nothing in the War brought so much cheer to Lincoln as the news of the great victories of Grant at Vicksburg and of Meade at Gettysburg during the early days of July. Grants' Memoirs are invaluable for the part he took in the war. Lincoln and his relation to the period may be studied in Charnwood, Morse and Tarbell.

GETTYSBURG AND ENVIRONS. The map will enable the student to follow the action of the great battle of July 2,3, 1863.

Use Grant vol I- 550, *here with, and*

Bassett at et.
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The Savannah Republican of the 9th inst., however, had a report that Johnston, by a stratagem, had succeeded in crossing the Big Black several days previous, and throwing reinforcements into Vicksburg. The World, in publishing this report, said that a private dispatch, received here but suppressed, confirmed the information. The regular published newspaper dispatches added none, however, up to the time of its publication here, though advices were then in our possession from Haine's Bluff on the 10th. These advices stated that late rains had improved the condition of our army, that our lines were being daily contracted, that Johnston was still receiving reinforcements from the east, and was "preparing to move forward." The rumor was added that 6000 of Kirby Smith's force had come up the Washita river, and were making demonstrations on the Louisiana shore, in consequence of which our troops at Milliken's Bend had been reinforced. There was also a report at Mobile that Kirby Smith, instead of being at Port Hudson, had taken Milliken's Bend and cut off Gen. Grant's supplies.

